**Data-Driven Decision-Making**

* 05/01/03



**Is It the Mantra of the Month or Does It Have Staying Power?**

'Data-driven decision-making': the term falls trippingly off the tongue. It has become a school-reform mantra that is celebrated but widely misunderstood, and is often ignored (despite its hype) or actively feared.

The term almost conjures up images of Bartleby the Scrivener, the protagonist of Herman Melville's eponymous tale. One can see the modern Bartleby, his green eyeshade, arm garters and three-legged stool gone; his quill pen replaced by Microsoft Excel spreadsheets; sitting in his district office, faced with the daunting task of harnessing student data to inform instructional decision-making; and saying with all the ambivalence of Melville's scrivener, 'I would prefer not to.'

Much ballyhoo, even hype, surrounds data-driven decision-making, which is the process of collecting student data - academic performance, attendance, demographics, etc. - in such a way that administrators, teachers and parents can accurately assess student learning. They can then make decisions based on the data to improve administrative and instructional systems to continually promote student achievement.

Governors, state legislators, reform-minded school superintendents, eager school board members, the occasional teacher, policy wonks and entrepreneurs wax enthusiastic. Used wisely and well, they say, data-driven decision-making will permit school boards to step back from their fixation on micromanagement and concentrate on effective policy formulation. They also tell us that practitioners in the trenches, from principals to classroom teachers, will be able to improve practices by pinpointing problems and transforming them into new opportunities.

At its best, data-driven decision-making is much more than an accountability tool; it is a diagnostic tool that permits - nay, encourages - teachers to tailor instruction to student needs. Thus, it finds that they can better and more easily direct their students toward success. So far, despite data-driven decision-making's many vocal proponents, it is equally clear that the message has not yet gotten to the front lines.

**Why Educators Resist It**

Why have some educators been resistant to a concept that has so much support from the government, businesses, parents and other stakeholders? Not to put too fine a point on it, the first reason is fear and loathing. With only slight exaggeration, it is safe to say that most educators view data as the enemy. Data is something a third party requires you to gather about yourself with the expectation that it will be used to embarrass you down the road. D'es this sound familiar: 'Kids doing poorly? Fire the bum! Kids doing well? They're so smart they could do well anywhere.'

The second and collateral reason for educator resistance is that, with few exceptions, educators see data as a burden, not an asset. Even if it is not going to be used to hold you up to ridicule, it has little utility. A teacher needs to spend time with his or her students, not with data entry and arcane analysis, the argument g'es. With the notable exception of attendance data, which in most districts generates revenue, school data neither simplifies life nor increases a sense of professional efficacy.

FOX Study

Accessing and analyzing the data was too complicated and time consuming.

“but the problem is getting appropriate data for individual instruction.” To effectively use data for differentiated instruction required that data collection and analysis made it easy for teachers to focus on improving instruction for each student.

Fox Chapel teachers have been examining assessment data on a continual basis since the implementation of a data-driven system. They monitor and adjust their instruction based on this valuable information and use it to evaluate the success of interventions.

Teams of teachers by grade levels, instructional teams, and/or departments examine student data as it relates to attainment of the Pennsylvania Academic Standards and Assessment Anchors.

Using this assessment data, teachers set goals for specific grade levels, teams, departments, groups, or individual students, plan for intervention/instructions and determine what evidence will be collected to monitor student progress.

“It’s a gift for teachers to be able to pinpoint areas where we can really make an impact”.

compares with your reality as a school teacher or even as a student when you were in public school—or as a parent. For students who are not currently in the classroom you can evaluate a case study on its merits and use the two DDM readings as points of reference. What impressed you or gave you pause? What additional questions does DDDM raise for you?

FC Area School District Implements DDDM

Data collection and analysis can be time consuming for teachers. Teachers are only interested in data that provides them with information to individualize instruction to meet students’ needs

Teachers also want to be able to find, analyze and interpret data quickly because they are always pressed for time.

The Fox Chapel School district uses a data collection system called EdInsight. This provides easy and instant access to student assessment data to teachers by class roster, making it easy for them to use the data to tweak instruction.

Using the collected data, teachers set goals, customize instruction, monitor progress and revisit goals to see what worked and what needs to be changed.

This Data Driven Decision Making has changed the way the teachers teach in this school district. Their instruction is driven by the data they collect.

Teachers in this district think that DDDM is a gift for teachers because they can pinpoint students’ weak areas gear the instruction to make an impact”.

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Teachers in my school district don’t necessarily share the same view. I lot of teachers in my school district feel more time is spent on collecting data. They see that data collection has benefits but they are not convinced that the benefit s and the time spent on it out weigh the drawbacks. They feel time spent on data collection and entering data in the system, if, spent teaching students would benefit them more.

This is especially true for teachers that teach special needs students they have to spend hours collecting, recording, analyzing and recording data for their students if they want any kind of additional resource or support in their classrooms. Even when it is obvious they need the support data is required to be collected to validate the decision. This is frustrating and counterproductive for them and teachers sometimes choose to go without the support than collect the multitude of data.

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Shawnette,

I agree with you. Just because DDDM worked for the FC school district it would work well for all school district. FC school district was a very small school district and that may have contributed to the fact the DDDM worked so well at for them. I feel that although data does give us good information we should not rely on the data alone. Teacher observation and interaction with students also allows them to learn many things about a student. I also agree that data collection should be modified for special needs students. In short I am not completely sold that decision making should only be based on data because there are many variables to that and decisions could be incorrect if based solely on data. It should be based on data and